

VZCZCXYZ0008
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBK #0247/01 0120443
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 120443Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4000
INFO RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY 0488
RUEHAE/AMEMBASSY ASMARA PRIORITY 0004
RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI PRIORITY 0014
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI PRIORITY 0267

UNCLAS BANGKOK 000247

SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [TH](#) [SO](#)
SUBJECT: THAI MFA REQUESTS HELP WITH ABDUCTION IN SOMALIA

11. (U) THIS IS AN ACTION REQUEST. Please see para 3.

12. (SBU) The Thai MFA has requested USG assistance in pressing Somali authorities to work with the Thai Government to secure the release of a Thai citizen held hostage in Somalia. On January 12, we spoke with Panyarak Poolthup, MFA Deputy Director General of the Department of South Asia, Middle East and African Affairs. Panyarak provided us with a non-paper describing the apparent linkage by Somali authorities of the hostage's fate with that of three Somalis held by Thai authorities after the Somalis hijacked a fishing vessel in April 2005. After reading the non-paper, we explained that the USG did not approve of hostage-taking. Nevertheless, this appeared to be a bilateral issue between Thailand and Somalia. We promised to forward the MFA's request to Washington, and to relay promptly to the MFA any reply we might receive.

13. (U) ACTION REQUESTED: Embassy requests that the Department provide a reply for the MFA, explaining what discussions, if any, we might have with Somali authorities to address Thai concerns about the seeming linkage of their hostage's fate with that of Somali fishing vessel hijackers.

14. (SBU) The text of the MFA non-paper follows.

BEGIN TEXT

Abduction of a Thai national in Somalia

On 21 October 2006, Mr. Sumanas Maneenin, a Thai national working as the coordinator for "Sirichai Fisheries," a Thai fishing company in Somalia, was abducted from his office in the Humuse Hotel in Bosaso, Puntland State of Somalia. Mr. Sumanas was later allowed to communicate by telephone to his office, saying that he had been abducted by a group of militia of the Mudug clan who are demanding the release of 3 Somalis serving jail terms in Thailand in exchange for his release. Mr. Sumanas reported that he had been transported to and was being held at an undisclosed location near the city of Galkoyo.

The 3 Somali offenders referred to by Mr. Sumanas were captured on the high seas with the help of the US Navy in April 2005 after they hijacked a Thai fishing vessel on which they were serving as security guards and took the Thai crew as hostages for ransom. The 3 Somalis were subsequently sentenced by the Thai criminal court to 10 years jail sentences. The case is still pending in the Thai court of appeals.

In response to the abduction of Mr. Sumanas, the Thai Embassy in Nairobi has contacted the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Transitional Federal Republic of Somalia to request

assistance in solving the hostage situation. The Transitional Federal Government of Somalia's position is that the two countries need to conclude and sign the "Agreement on the Transferring of Offenders and on Cooperation in the Enforcement of Penal Sentences," and use the framework of this Agreement to immediately remand the 3 Somali prisoners into Somali custody. This is implicitly a "precondition" before proceeding with securing the release of Mr. Sumanas from the militia.

The Royal Thai Government cannot accept linkage of the illegal kidnapping of a Thai citizen to the case of the 3 Somali citizens who have been convicted of a serious crime and are currently subjected to the judicial process in Thailand. The two issues are unequivocally separate matters.

The Royal Thai Government has previously expressed willingness to cooperate with the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia on the process to conclude the draft Agreement on the Transferring of Offenders and on Cooperation in the Enforcement of Penal Sentences, and is currently waiting for a response from the Somali side to the Thai proposed draft of the said Agreement. The process of transferring of offenders requires the jurisdiction process to be completed and the offenders to serve a minimum of one-third of their jail terms in Thailand before a transfer can be requested. This is the process that would apply in order to repatriate the 3 Somalis back to serve their prison sentences in their homeland.

The Thai Government, therefore, wishes to seek support in encouraging the Government of the Transitional Federal Republic of Somalia to work with the Royal Thai Government in accordance with international norms and practices to secure the immediate and unconditional release of the abducted Thai citizen.

END TEXT
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